

OUT OF DOOR LIFE IN TOWN.

PROBABLY two of the strongest links which bind together all "House of Education" students, whether past or present, are the keen interest that we all have in the study of nature and the study of children. At Amble-side we have ample scope for our leanings towards natural history and botany. Every walk, even in winter, provides material for observation, admiration, and wonder. The old-fashioned "constitutional" is transformed into a daily delight, from which we return with our minds renewed by fresh thoughts as our lungs are by the fresh air. We shall miss these walks when we leave the Lake District, especially if we are fated to dwell in a large town, and perhaps there will be a tendency to fall back into a listless, unobservant way when we are out of doors. But we must not allow ourselves to imagine that there is nothing in city streets worthy of our observation. If there are not many flowers there are certainly a great many children. The little street children who play at every corner and swarm in every alley furnish material for endless interesting study. Left for the time entirely to their own resources, there is in each game that they play something characteristic of their bringing-up and the surroundings among which they live, besides of their own child natures, each one so distinct and yet having so much in common with those of children in all countries and classes. Almost wherever you may be, there is likely to be some plot of waste ground or open space where the children congregate. I have now in my mind the picture of a small recreation ground, hardly larger than an average suburban garden, and completely surrounded by densely-packed little houses, which is, probably, only a type of many in other districts. When this very unexpected little oasis in a desert of bricks and mortar bursts into view, one feels very grateful to the "Public Gardens Association" for having presented it to the neighbourhood. There are plenty of hardy flowers which, to the credit of the visitors, are allowed to flourish undisturbed. There are a few daisies on the grass, dandelions, groundsel and bindweed by the walks, an occasional butterfly in the summer, and always a dozen or more children. To sit down on one of the seats and make friends with the children is a very easy matter. Perhaps, in order to "break the ice," you had better take a bag of biscuits or chocolates

the first time; but, at all events, take something which can be distributed in small instalments, so that little Miss Muffit may be tempted to return, even if she is "frightened away" at first. But they are friendly little folk, and if they are shy at first they are sure to give way to a little coaxing and become confidential at last. They will tell you all about the baby of the family, somehow there always is one, and it is always "my baby" to each of them. They will tell you that "father's a bricklayer," in a tone which makes you feel that you have never properly appreciated the profession of bricklaying. They could not be prouder of it if he were a cabinet minister. They will tell you how many times a week the "mother" goes charing, and how "my Polly got a text from her teacher and father's going to get it framed"—little things, indeed, but enough to call up a bright and pleasing little picture of the home life to your mind. Occasionally, though by no means frequently, another kind of picture is called up. They tell you how "the lady" lodger had a fight with another lady, which they saw while fetching "father's beer," or how "father's took," *i.e.*, arrested, and there's no one but themselves to "mind baby," because mother's out washing. The sort of homes they come from manifests itself in everything they do or say. In many of their games, with the faculty that children have for unconsciously imitating their elders, they show by tone and gesture what their parents are like. When a rosy, fresh-looking little girl sings with plenty of illustrative action—

"I'm up in the morning early,
I'm up in the morning gay,
I'm washing and scrubbing, soaping and rubbing,
The whole of the live-long day,"

you picture a stout, bright-looking mother working about with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, and you like the woman at once although you have not seen her. Another game, which may be classed with this one as being dramatic in character, is one in which the players join hands and dance round, saying—

"When I was a lady,
And this way I went,"

stopping to imitate what they think a lady does, the most usual idea being that a lady walks on tip-toe, looks at the ground, and holds up her pinafore. They go on playing this, substituting tinker, soldier, etc., for "lady," and doing the action accordingly. Then there is the perennial and ever favourite "Poor Jinny is a-weeping." Poor Jinny has to kneel

down in the middle of a ring of children, and by her piteous sobs draws forth enquiries as to the cause of her grief, whereupon she sings in answer—

“I'm weeping for a sweetheart, a sweetheart, a sweetheart ;
I'm weeping for a sweetheart on a long summer's day.”

The ring of children answer with—

“Oh, pray stand up and choose one, and choose one, and choose one ;
Oh, pray stand up and choose one, on a long summer's day.”

If Jinny is naturally prudent, she considers quite a long time, with a corner of her pinafore in her mouth to aid her thoughts. At last she goes up to one of the ring, and pulling him unceremoniously into the middle, the two embrace. The others meanwhile sing—

“Now you're married we wish you joy,
First a girl and then a boy ;
Seven years past and seven years over,
Pray cuddle and kiss together ;
Kiss her once, kiss her twice, kiss her three times over.
I will not part from my sweetheart
For twopence and three farthings.”

After which the fickle Jinny leaves her sweetheart and joins the ring, and so it goes on in turn.

Besides these they play many good old-fashioned games that we have all played ourselves at one time or other. We feel that we are among old friends when we hear the tune of “Oranges and Lemons,” “Here we come Gathering Nuts and May,” “Do you Know the Muffin Man?”

And you will probably not find it too long before the children's play-time is over, and they break up their games and scatter. Some will go straight home, while others will have first to take their father's dinner to him while he is driving the tram. And a very appetising meal it looks—plenty of hot pease pudding with gravy and a slice or two of boiled beef—and all for fivepence. And so, with the wish that the poor man had a little more leisure in which to enjoy his dinner, you bethink yourself of your own and turn homewards, feeling, I hope, something of the mental refreshment and recreation which comes to the mind when it has for a time been lifted out of its usual groove.

D. N.

CONCENTRATION IN WORK.

AMONGST the various methods by which our leading educationists are trying to make lessons more suitable, and therefore more interesting, to children, may be found that of concentration. Used in their sense, this means the inter-locking of the subjects for instruction so that each lesson shall lead into, or at least have some bearing on, the next.

This method is carried out in great perfection in some of the German schools. Professor Rein's school at Jena is the best known. In his programme, or concentration table for the summer term for 1889, he takes Biblical History as his central subject—Israel in Egypt. There are drawing lessons on Egyptian columns; the geography lesson opens up a vast field for study—sandy deserts, oases, river deltas, irrigation; the Pyramids are modelled, and the whole period is made of vivid interest to the child. In the second school year the book “Robinson Crusoe” is taken as the central thought, and the children do, as far as possible, everything Robinson Crusoe does. They build houses, cook dinners, make baskets with reeds, rafts, and learn to read and write. In some American schools, I believe, geography is taken as the central subject for concentration, and the other studies grouped round it. It is a good subject to take, as it links itself naturally with so many others; it is closely related to history; map-making relates it to drawing, geometry, and arithmetic; the vegetation, climate, etc., to the Natural Sciences.

Of course there are certain subjects which must stand more or less alone, though I can think of no subject which does not link itself with at least *one* other. Arithmetic and instrumental music might, at first sight, appear to be isolated, but they are connected with one another through the theory of music, to which arithmetic is indispensable. This may be illustrated by the time-names used in the Curwen system of music, which are mental pictures of fractions.

We believe that the object of instruction is the formation of ideas, and surely the idea of the unity of their work ought to be a central one to children. We know the strength of the association of ideas, how every thought is linked to some other thought in our minds, and the remembrance of one leads to the remembrance of the other; therefore it is easy to see that the more we can bring this principle into the children's lessons